CARRYING SPIRIT IN SONG: MUSIC AND THE MAKING OF ANCESTORS AT *ZEZURU KUROVA GUVA* CEREMONIES[1]

by

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Introduction

Among speakers of the Zezuru dialect of Shona in central Zimbabwe, the *kurova guva* ceremony is held roughly a year after the funeral of an adult man or woman whose spirit is said to be wandering in the bush after death without regulated ties to its kin.[2] *Kurova guva* is performed to call the spirit of the deceased back from this ambiguous position, transforming it into a recognized *mudzimu* ancestor (pl. *vadzimu*).[3] This act of reincorporation, however, poses risks to surviving members of the lineage, and the creation of the *mudzimu* spirit at *kurova guva* is thus equated with a war, in which family members struggle against the enemies of illness, witchcraft and death.

Musical performance is an integral part of ritual action at *kurova guva*, where song is used to summon the spirit of the deceased and carry it home, transforming the wandering spirit into a *mudzimu* ancestor. While a variety of musical genres are performed at *kurova guva*, one song in particular has come to assume special meaning for participants at the ceremony. The song, "Baya Wabaya", belongs to the genre of *nziyo dzengondo*, or songs of war.[4] At *kurova guva*, it is sung during a moment of heightened ritual significance, as participants exit the home of the deceased and go in procession to his or her grave, then come back across the threshold of the house, symbolically enacting the spirit's return to the family's ancestral lineage.

During this moment of spiritual transformation, music is one way in which participants seek to bridge the space between the living and ancestral worlds, and to

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2 While my research was conducted in Zezuru speaking areas, similar ceremonies are also held among speakers of other Shona dialects.

3 *Kurova guva* is held only for adult individuals with living children or grandchildren, since those without living descendants have no role to play as a *mudzimu* ancestral spirit. For more on the role of *vadzimu* spirits within the Shona belief system, see for example Fry (1976) and Lan (1985). For an ethnographic account of the *kurova guva* ceremony, see Holleman (1953).

4 "Baya Wabaya" can alternately be called "Nyama Yekugocha". Both names are derived from the song's lyrics and are used interchangeably.

reclaim their deceased relative as a *mudzimu* ancestor. In this article, I ask why "Baya Wabaya" is so consistently sung at *kurova guva*. Why does this song in particular play such an integral role in the procession to and from the grave during these final funerary rites? How does a song of war which dates back at least to the 19th century continue to speak to the lives and experiences of present-day Zimbabweans in mourning for departed family members? While "Baya Wabaya" is sung at diverse occasions, both ritual and secular in nature, my research shows that it assumes a particular set of associations in the context of *kurova guva*. A song of war, it evokes a network of symbolic relationships between bloodshed, hunting and the wilderness, causing participants to reflect on themes of fundamental importance at *kurova guva*, including illness, witchcraft and death.

The performance of "Baya Wabaya" at *kurova guva* contributes important new perspectives to scholarship on music and ritual in Zimbabwe. First, previous scholarship has focused largely on musical performance during spirit possession ceremonies such as *bira*.[5] While this research has contributed to a rich understanding of the role of music in facilitating communication between the *vadzimu* ancestral spirits and their living kin, the presence of the *vadzimu* cannot be taken for granted. My research emphasizes how *vadzimu* spirits are brought into existence at *kurova guva*, where "Baya Wabaya" is an integral part of the ritual action undertaken by family members to transform the spirit of the deceased into a recognized *mudzimu* ancestor. While possession is not expected during *kurova guva* itself, the ceremony establishes a foundation for the institution of spirit mediumship, for without it, possession during other ceremonies, such as *bira*, would no longer be possible. *Kurova guva* thus determines the very possibility of mediumship in other ritual contexts.

Second, despite what I show to be a clear importance placed by participants on the performance of "Baya Wabaya" during the graveside procession, much previous research has dismissed the singing of *ngondo* songs at *kurova guva* as incomprehensible, thus rendering it inconsequential.[6] For example, the most recent detailed ethnographic account of the *kurova guva* ceremony, written by Michael Gelfand in 1971, states, "The reason for the singing of *ngondo* (battle) songs, with words which are strange for a procession to a grave is difficult of explanation…What is so striking is that they bear no relation to the sadness of the occasion tending to appear ridiculous or laughable by the nature of their contents" (74). The trivialization of musical performance in the literature on *kurova guva* both obscures the fundamental importance of song within the ritual, and results in an incomplete account of how the *mudzimu* spirit is made. I suggest that listening closely to "Baya Wabaya" is essential to understanding the transformative rite of *kurova guva*, as song constitutes a particularly powerful form of ritual action

5 For more on *mbira* performance at the *bira* ceremony, see Berliner (1978).

6 Previous scholarship on the *kurova guva* ceremony includes Bourdillon (1998); Gelfand (1959), (1971); and Holleman (1953).

for participants at this ceremony, which itself sustains a much larger world of ritual practice.

Invoking Multiple Codes: *Kurova guva* in Contemporary Zezuru Religious Practice

While the ultimate origins of "Baya Wabaya" cannot be ascertained, a version of the song is documented as having been performed as early as the end of the 19th century, during Shona battles against Shangaan and Ndebele raiders (Kauffman 1970). At present, "Baya Wabaya" continues to be sung in a variety of contexts, including political rallies and professional sports matches.[7] Nevertheless, the song has retained a particular association with *kurova guva*. While "Baya Wabaya" is not the only song that may be played during the procession to and from the grave of the deceased at the ritual, its performance overwhelmingly dominates, and ceremony participants regularly emphasize its importance over other musical alternatives. For example, as Cosmas Magaya, an *mbira* player from Mhondoro, prepared to hold *kurova guva* for his father, a highly respected traditional healer (*n'anga*) and village headman (*sabhuku*), he commented, "When you go to take the spirit, you have got to be singing 'Baya Wabaya'. That is the song which has got to be sung" (Interview, Magaya 2000a). Likewise, Judith Juma, an *mbira* player who regularly performs at *kurova guva* ceremonies, stated, "They go to the grave singing 'Yave Nyama Yekugocha [Baya Wabaya]'. They will be going at this moment to take back the spirit. When they return to the house, they will be singing this also" (Interview, Juma 2000). While it is neither exclusive to this ritual event nor the only musical alternative appropriate for performance at this time, "Baya Wabaya" remains intimately linked with the graveside procession at *kurova guva*.

During the course of my research, I spent approximately a year and a half in the field attending *kurova guva* ceremonies, where I often participated as an *mbira* player.[8] In this article, I discuss a field recording of one particular performance of "Baya Wabaya", alongside interviews that I conducted with participants at this and other ceremonies during the course of my fieldwork. I made the field recording at a private home on the Sandringham Mission grounds in the Mhondoro rural areas on 22 August 2003, during a *kurova guva* ceremony held for a long-time member of the Ruwadzano women's group of the Methodist Church. Judith Juma, a respected spirit medium (*svikiro*) and *mbira* player, and the daughter of the deceased, invited me to the ceremony, to which we traveled from Harare, where Juma currently resides.

In many respects, musical and ritual performance at this *kurova guva* was representative of the various ceremonies I attended in the rural areas of central Zimbabwe

[7] For more on "Baya Wabaya" in the context of professional soccer matches, see Chapanga (2004).

[8] In Zimbabwe, my fieldwork took place from May to August of 2000, in December of 2001, and from September of 2002 through October of 2003. I conducted some additional fieldwork for this project in Eugene, Oregon, and in London, England.

during my fieldwork. As always, however, some aspects of this event were modified to reflect the particular circumstances under which it was held. Most importantly, this ceremony was structured in order to accommodate ritual actions oriented both toward Methodist practices and toward the *vadzimu* ancestors.[9] For this reason, Juma's family went in procession to the grave twice; on the dawn on the first day, they enacted the rituals of *kurova guva*, and on the dawn of the second, they participated in unveiling a new headstone on the grave, an event officiated by a Methodist priest.

Members of Juma's family related to me that their decision to conduct *kurova guva* before the Christian unveiling of the headstone was intentional. During *kurova guva*, beer and other ritual substances are poured on the grave, leaving visible signs of ritual activity. Because family members felt it would be inappropriate to invite a priest to conduct a Christian service in front of a grave so clearly marked by this ritual practice, they performed *kurova guva* first while the grave was still covered only with soil. Male family members then proceeded to work throughout the following day, covering the grave in cement and positioning the headstone upon it, thereby eliminating any visible traces of *kurova guva* before the priest arrived the following morning.

As it is covered in beer, enveloped in cement, and adorned with a headstone, multiple cultural codes are literally layered upon the grave. This co-existence of Christian and indigenous practice denotes what Sandra Barnes has referred to in her work on Ogun as a zone of metaphysical tension in which "multiple codes of knowledge meet and where homogenization and differentiation simultaneously take place" (1997:xvii). At *kurova guva*, the grave represents a physical site where beliefs and ideas with distinctive characters are brought together, and yet maintain a certain symbolic distance. In a heterogeneous religious environment, *kurova guva* is worked and reworked, undergoing subtle shifts in meaning.[10] The ceremony thus provides a fascinating example of the vitality of contemporary religious practice in Zimbabwe as documented by scholars such as Terence Ranger, who have sought to emphasize both syncretism and systematic difference (1995:227).

Carrying Spirit in Song: The Role of "Baya Wabaya" in Making the *Mudzimu*

As participants go in procession from the family home to their relative's grave, they sing "Baya Wabaya" to call upon the spirit of the deceased, which is said to be wandering in the bush after death. Accompanied by their ritual best friends or *sahwira*, they seek to summon the spirit back from the wilderness to the site of the grave in order to carry it home, reincorporating it within the family lineage. During this procession,

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9 The accommodation of both Christian and traditional beliefs is a common aspect of many contemporary *kurova guva* ceremonies across diverse denominations. The Catholic Church has even published its own catechesis, intended to reconcile this ritual practice with Catholic teachings. See "Kuchenura munhu kana kuti: *Kurova guva* kana kugadzira mufi," *Shona Ritual*, Commissioned by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (Harare: Mambo Press, 1982).

10 For more on the interaction between *kurova guva* and Christian practices, see also Daneel (1971).

song is used to communicate with the spirit of the deceased, ensuring its presence during the ritual activity which follows. As Judith Juma emphasizes, "when they go singing, the spirit will then understand that 'The people who are singing are from my home'... This makes the spirit of the deceased quickly feel great emotion – 'My relatives are searching for me'" (Interview, Juma 2000). "Baya Wabaya" is therefore sung until the procession reaches the grave, at which point the music stops in order to make way for other ritual activity, including a formal verbal appeal to the spirit.

On top of the grave, a goat is commonly drowned in a small hole, which is filled with beer or water. The blood of this animal must not be spilled until the life has entirely left its body, as blood from a live animal is considered to be offensive to the spirit (Interview, Dyoko 2002). Next, its body is cut open, and the partially digested food from its intestines removed and mixed with beer. This mixture is used to cover the grave, symbolically representing the act of smearing the walls of a new home with cow dung and water. For *mbira* player Tute Chigamba, this ritual gesture is intended to facilitate the ability of the deceased's spirit to return to the family, by constructing a symbolic dwelling for his or her spirit.

> The house, the room he was staying, they used to smear the dung inside and, you know, as a floor polish. So there, this is your home; the grave is your home. You are no longer being with us here, so we smear this again to remind you that you were, you know, you were staying with other people inside the room where you used to use the dung. So this is your home; when you visit us, then when you come back here you know this is your home. (Interview, Chigamba 2000c)

In completing this act, the family informs the spirit that the grave is its new home, as this is the body's final resting place.[11]

Beer is also poured on the grave as a libation to the spirit, and a designated agnatic relative kneels at the head of the grave to address the deceased, imploring him or her to return to the family as a *mudzimu* ancestor. According to Juma, this relative should preferably be the father of the deceased, or a paternal uncle or grandchild. As the speaker kneels to make this address, other participants accompany his words by clapping with cupped hands (*kuuchira*):

> Grandfather, as you see we have arrived in this way. We have come here to your grave on this day, look and see. You have been circling around in the forest without your relatives, so today it is us, your relatives, who have come as we have, in order to take you up and go home with you so that you might start to look after your family, and so that you might also join the others of your people. Not that you will come with the war which has killed you, no. We do not want war. No. We want it to get up and go from here, to go back to those who have killed

[11] According to Chigamba, this ritual gesture also embodies concerns related to purity and pollution. Partly digested food removed directly from intestines of the animal is thus used instead of regular dung in order to ensure its purity and avoid the possibility of encountering unclean or polluting substances introduced through witchcraft (Interview, Chigamba 2000c). As we will later see, this concern with avoiding spiritual contamination is also expressed through the performance of "Baya Wabaya".

you. We want you, the child of our home, since when you were born, you were born without war around, and thus today we want to take you without war. War, let it be left here to fight on its own. We will take you back and go home with you.[12]

As the procession returns from the gravesite, participants carry the spirit of the deceased with them, in order to finally resolve the liminal state which has characterized it since death. Much as "Baya Wabaya" was sung on the way to the grave in order to summon the spirit of the deceased, it is now sung again as the procession crosses the threshold of the deceased's house, this time serving as a musical vehicle enabling participants to bring the spirit home in song.[13]

As it is sung in the course of this procession, "Baya Wabaya" is typically performed with only minimal instrumental accompaniment, often a single drum (*ngoma*), hoisted on the shoulders of a sole drummer, who plays the following rhythm (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Characteristic rhythmic pattern of "Baya Wabaya"

In comparison with the intricate, fast-paced drumming patterns characteristic of other Zezuru drumming genres such as *jerusarema*, *dandanda*, or *jiti*, the song's rhythm seems markedly simple and spare. Played by a single musician, it entails none of the dynamic interplay possible between two or more interlocking parts, and leaves little room for virtuosic improvisation. Its slow pace conveys a solemnity befitting the occasion, as family members approach the grave of their kin for the first time since the funeral.

Variation in the song's instrumentation is not uncommon, however. When skilled *mbira dzavadzimu* players are available, for example, they may provide *mbira* accompaniment for the singers. Thus, Rhoda Dzomba, an *mbira* player from the Gokwe region who often performed with members of the Juma family during the course of my fieldwork, commented, "In several places I am accustomed to hearing people sing 'Baya Wabaya, Yave Nyama Yekugocha' with the African drum, *ngoma*. But you can play it on *mbira* again" (Interview, Dzomba 2000). *Hosho* shakers may also be played to accompany the *mbira* players, or to execute the song's characteristic rhythm in the absence of a drum.

As with many other Zimbabwean song genres, "Baya Wabaya" involves call-and-response vocal lines. The *mabvumira*, or response part, is sung by a group. As their melody and text generally vary little, *mabvumira* lines provide an opportunity for anyone, regardless of musical ability, to take part. Much as Paul Berliner has observed regarding

[12] Because recording at the site of the grave is not always permitted, this example of the type of discourse characteristic of rituals performed at the gravesite is taken from an interview with Judith Juma conducted by the author on 24 July 2000. Similar types of graveside discourse can be found in Gelfand (1962).

[13] Green tree branches may also be held by participants to symbolize carrying the spirit home during this second half of the procession.

mbira performance at the Shona *bira* ceremony, "Baya Wabaya" is likewise capable of incorporating large numbers of participants with varying skill levels, an attribute of particular import in a ritual setting where participation is highly valued.[14] Expectations regarding musical participation extended also to me as a researcher, posing a special set of challenges for making field recordings, for if I stopped singing in order to record other participants' voices with greater clarity, concerned participants often also stopped, in order to encourage me to rejoin them.

The *kushaura*, or lead part, on the other hand, is sung by a single individual, and is characterized by a high degree of improvisation, with melodic variations arising as new lines of text are introduced by the lead singer. *Kushaura* singers may introduce dozens of different lyrics during the context of a single performance, evoking a network of symbolic associations for participants at *kurova guva* which I discuss at greater length in the following section. Before I address the imagery of the song's text, however, I begin with a more detailed discussion of "Baya Wabaya" as sung by Judith Juma, using this particular performance to illustrate a more general set of musical dynamics common to the song's performance in the ritual context of *kurova guva*.

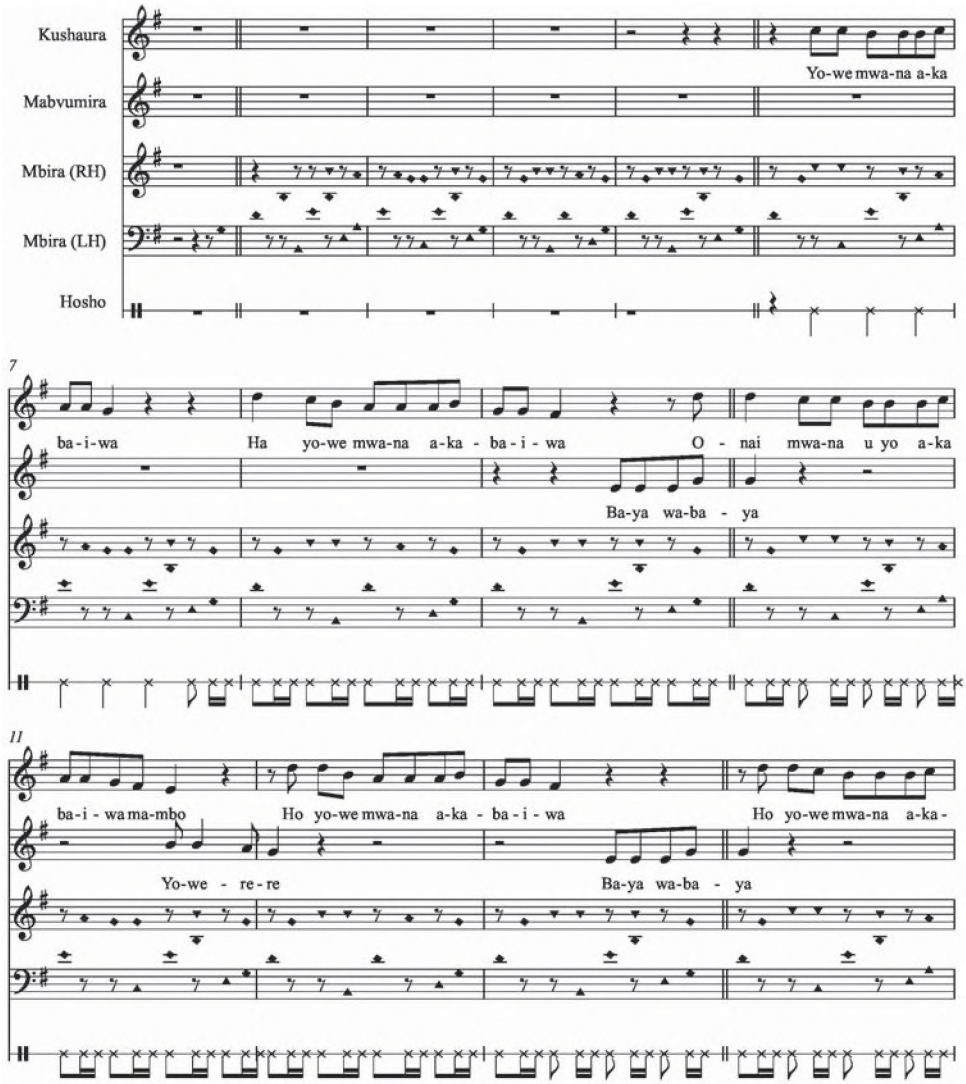
Most notably, the musical texture of "Baya Wabaya" is highly variable at *kurova guva*. Even within the first few minutes of a twenty-minute performance during the procession to Juma's mother's grave, for example, the song's texture varies widely. In addition to *kushaura* and *mabvumira* singing lines, this rendition of "Baya Wabaya" initially includes *hosho*, rather than the *ngoma* drum, and features *mbira* accompaniment, as played by Juma's son Dingiswayo. At this point in the song, the *hosho* plays a modified *mbira*-style pattern, rather than the distinctive rhythm typically played on the *ngoma* drum (see Figure 2).

In translating "Baya Wabaya" into staff notation, I have employed conventional key and time signatures. The key signature is taken from the tuning of Dingiswayo Juma's *mbira*, while the 4/4 time signature is used to accommodate a cyclical song form comprised of sixteen main pulses, represented here by a quarter note. This sixteen-beat cycle is shared by both the *mbira* part and the vocal lines. In this transcription, the entire cycle thus transpires over the course of four bars.

Roughly one minute after the song begins, however, the *mbira* and *hosho* both drop out of the musical texture, leaving only the *kushaura* and *mabvumira* vocal parts. After this brief period of unaccompanied song, the singers are rejoined by the *hosho*, upon which the distinctive rhythm characteristic of "Baya Wabaya" is now played (see Figure 3).

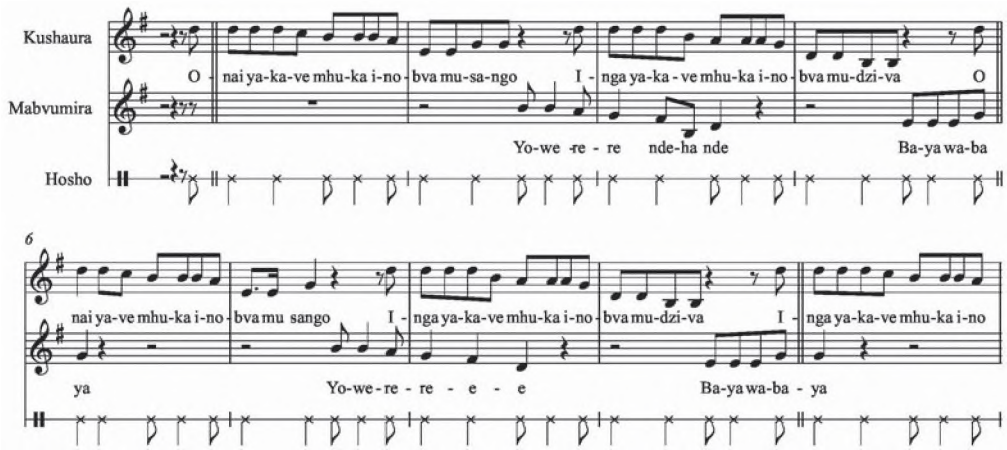
[14] See Berliner (1978).

Figure 2: Initial texture of "Baya Wabaya" with *mbira*, vocals, and *hosho*[15]



[15] The Juma family's *mbiras* are tuned roughly to the key of B, with a flat seventh. For the purposes of transcription, however, I have transposed this performance of "Baya Wabaya" to the key of G, leaving F# in the key signature as the flat seventh in the *mbira* is not used in this particular performance – perhaps because it would conflict with the raised seventh present in the *kushaura* singing lines. Double bar lines denote the cyclical song form, comprised of 16 main pulses, represented here by a quarter note. This 16-beat cycle is shared by both the *mbira* part and the vocal lines. In my transcription, I have chosen to represent the right hand and left hand registers of the *mbira* on separate staves, with shaped note-heads further distinguishing between the different registers. On the right hand, downward facing triangular note-heads represent keys played by the right index finger, while square note-heads represent those played by the right thumb. On the left hand, upward facing triangular note-heads represent keys located on the lower left-hand register, while square note-heads represent those on the upper left-hand register.

Figure 3: Texture at minute 1:29, with the typical "Baya Wabaya" rhythm on *hosho*



This performance illustrates how the motion of walking exerts an influence on the song, creating a texture especially prone to fluctuation as different individuals move in and out of range of other participants. When sung during the procession to the grave at *kurova guva*, "Baya Wabaya" is heard not as a sonic totality, but as a fluid musical fabric, comprised of strands which are repeatedly woven together and pulled apart as participants move at their own pace throughout the course of the procession. As they sing, participants trace a physical path from the home to grave and back again, mapping the rural landscape in a way which becomes impossible in an urban environment where graves are located in distant cemeteries and participants in the procession are confined to transportation in private vehicles.[16]

As sung at *kurova guva*, "Baya Wabaya" is also often characterized by a distinctive vocal timbre, setting this performance context apart from any other in which the song is heard. Since *kurova guva* marks the first time since the funeral that family members visit the grave of their kin, this procession vividly reminds participants of their bereavement, calling up the emotions of loss, grief, and mourning experienced during the burial itself. Participants now bid farewell to the departed one last time, as *kurova guva* is the final occasion when personal connections with the deceased can be expressed in terms of

[16] Indeed, at two urban ceremonies I attended in Harare during 2002, participants drove to the cemetery in a pick-up truck rather than proceeding on foot, and did not sing "Baya Wabaya" during this drive. While I did not go to the graveyard because of a lack of adequate transportation, I spoke with participants who did. At one ceremony, two *mbira* players who accompanied family members driving to the grave told me that they played two separate songs, "Dangamvura" and "Marenje", on the trip home from the graveyard, rather than one continuous song. At the other ceremony, held for a Shona-speaking woman born in Harare to a Mozambican mother and Malawian father, participants related that no one played any type of music on the way to or from the grave.

human relationships, rather than relations between the human and spirit worlds.[17] As Cosmas Magaya explains, the close association between "Baya Wabaya" and the ritual action of reclaiming the spirit means that "...this song is not a song which is usually played just anywhere or anytime...Because usually it reminds people of difficult times. And during that process of going to the grave, you know, people even cry, you know, remembering the deceased person..." (Interview, Magaya 2000b). These emotions color the vocal quality of "Baya Wabaya", for as participants reflect on their loss, their sorrow and grief become clearly inscribed in song.

As Judith Juma walks in procession to her mother's grave in the tall, dew-laden grass, accompanied by her father, siblings, children, and other close family and friends, her voice is quickly coloured with memories of her mother's death. Soon, she is audibly crying as she sings, and her vocal timbre takes on a rough, breathy quality. Juma frequently introduces vocables and interjectives such as *yowe* and *yowerere*, used to express suffering or distress (Hannan 1996:739). While these interjectives are heard in everyday speech, they are also part of mourners' cries for the deceased during funerary rites. This type of verbal utterance thus functions as a metonym for the act of mourning, and is especially powerful in articulating strong emotions. The repeated vowel sounds of these interjectives further allow for especially fluid vocal phrasing, drawing attention to the expressive qualities of the human voice in the context of suffering, loss and grief. "Baya Wabaya" thus expresses a poetics which entails the fusion of "categories of performance with the categories of feeling" (Seremetakis 1991).

Despite the fluidity of its musical texture, and its ability to accommodate emotions of mourning and grief, sonic continuity must be maintained throughout the performance of "Baya Wabaya". This is especially true as this journey departs from the gravesite and returns to the home of the deceased, for the song now serves as a musical vessel in which the spirit is symbolically carried home. Participants sing "Baya Wabaya" continuously and without interruption for the full duration of the procession, ceasing only once they have crossed the threshold of the home, when the spirit is said to have successfully completed its transition to a recognized *mudzimu* ancestor.[18] All individuals with whom I spoke emphasized the importance of singing "Baya Wabaya" continuously as the procession returns from the grave and crosses over the threshold of the family home. Cosmas Magaya, for example, stated,

....they start singing "Baya Wabaya" until they get to the house. They can't stop, yeah.

[17] Other songs performed at *kurova guva* explicitly address this ritual as the moment of a "last goodbye". The *jiti* song "Kwekupedzisera", for example, includes the lyrics, "We are now praying for the last time [for the deceased]. This is the last goodbye".

[18] At some ceremonies I additionally observed participants carrying a green leafy branch which served a similar symbolic function, likewise acting as a vehicle to "carry" the spirit home. A prohibition against looking backward in the direction of the grave is also observed by participants while they sing "Baya Wabaya" in this procession back from the site of the grave, further reinforcing an emphasis on ensuring the spirit will be successfully carried across the threshold of the family's home.

> They are carrying somebody now. They are carrying somebody so they are now serious, you know, praying. They are now very much committed. Everybody is now very much committed. They are now together with the spirit, so you know, it's time to be very serious about things. (Interview, Magaya 2000a)

"Baya Wabaya" is an integral part of *kurova guva*, providing important opportunities for collective participation in ritual activity through musical performance. Through its symbolic role in calling the spirit and carrying it back home at *kurova guva*, the song also serves as an audible sign of the spirit's transformation into a *mudzimu* ancestor.

Waging War against Death: Symbolic Associations in "Baya Wabaya"

At *kurova guva*, participants confront the calamity and confusion of death, which "threatens the normal structure of existence by unleashing unknown and potentially destructive forces into the family system" (Cox 1995:347). In addition to its role as a ritual action used to summon the spirit and carry it home, "Baya Wabaya" speaks to these concerns by articulating a complex symbolic network linking war, hunting, witchcraft, death and grief. Here, I illustrate these symbolic associations as they appear in the *kushaura* lyrics sung by Judith Juma at the *kurova guva* ceremony held for her mother. This symbolism, however, must be understood as rooted not only in the song's lyrics, but also in its generic affiliation as a song of war or *nziyo yengondo*, already closely associated with violence, bloodshed, war, and death. Even if a *kushaura* singer were to sing mainly vocables, rather than lines of text with more explicit semantic meaning, the network of symbolic associations in "Baya Wabaya" would therefore remain equally vivid for participants at *kurova guva*.

In the first two minutes of a twenty-minute performance during the procession to her mother's grave, Judith Juma begins "Baya Wabaya" with the following lines of text:

Yowe mwana akabaiwa	*Yowe,* the child has been stabbed
Ho yowe mwana akabaiwa	*Ho yowe,* the child has been stabbed
Onai mwana uyo akabaiwa mambo	Look, this child has been stabbed, oh chief
Ho yowe mwana akabaiwa	*Ho yowe* the child has been stabbed
Ho yowe mwana akaparara uyo	*Ho yowe* that child has perished
Yowe mwana akaparara	*Yowe,* the child has perished
Ho yowe mwana akadyiwa neiko?	*Ho yowe,* what was the child eaten by?
Ho yowe mwana akabaiwa	*Ho yowe,* the child was stabbed
Ho ndati yowe mwana akadyiwa nei?	*Ho,* I said *yowe,* what was the child eaten by?
Yowe mwana akabaiwa	*Yowe,* the child was stabbed
A hiya ha batai makano	*A hiya ha,* take up axes
A hiya ha ho murwe hondo	*A hiya ha,* and wage war
A hiya ha batai makano	*A hiya ha,* take up axes
A hiya ha ho murwe hondo	*A hiya ha,* and wage war
Ho yowerere Nehoreka	*Ho yowerere Nehoreka*
Ho yowe mwana akabaiwa	*Ho yowe* the child has been stabbed
Ho yowe mwana akaparara	*Ho yowe* the child has perished

Ho yowe mwana akabaiwa	*Ho yowe* the child has been stabbed
Inga yakave mhuka inobva musango	Behold, it has become an animal from the forest
Inga yakave mhuka inobva mudziva	Behold, it has become an animal from a river pool
Onai yave mhuka inobva musango	Look, it has become an animal from the forest
Onai yakave mhuka inobva mudziva	Look, it has become an animal from a river pool

The vivid images of the violence, war, and death evoked in these lyrics, many of which are common to other renditions I heard of the song at *kurova guva*, are further reinforced by the *mabvumira* line "Baya wabaya", or "Stab, you stab".

Participants with whom I spoke about the song's lyrics regularly emphasized war as a powerful metaphor for death. For example, Juma's regular *mbira* partner during the time of my research, Rhoda Dzomba, interpreted the lyrics to "Baya Wabaya" by comparing death to a battle in which "…the enemies, each and every one, have thrown their spears and have repeatedly stabbed the one who has passed away. They made him into their sacrifice like an animal which has become meat for roasting" (Interview, Dzomba 2000). Cosmas Magaya further linked the dangers of *kurova guva* to the presence of blood, so closely associated with both death and war:

> When they say "baya wabaya", it means expect anything, you can spear anybody. Because at a war, there's a kind of pandemonium, or what have you, so one has got to be very careful. So you never know where the spear might come from. You know, blood it spilt. Blood is spilt at war. And this person is dead now, so his blood has been lost. This is now somebody that is now late…this is why again, according to the traditional ways, people go to try and find out what was the cause of this person's death. (Interview, Magaya 2000a)

According to Magaya, the *mabvumira* phrase "stab, you stab" additionally connotes the idea of many people stabbing simultaneously, and of spears flying in all directions; in other words, an image of the chaos and confusion inherent in the course of battle.

While previous scholarship has focused on the linkages between mediumship, music, and war in the context of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, references to war in the performance of "Baya Wabaya" at the *kurova guva* ceremony must be considered within a larger symbolic matrix.[19] In singing "Baya Wabaya", participants evoke war not only as a historical phenomenon, but also as a broad conceptual category able to encompass the threat posed by bloodshed, violence, and death both to particular individuals, and entire lineages. At *kurova guva*, participants wage war against death itself, from which they seek to recover their kin as a *mudzimu* ancestor. By facilitating the involvement of large groups of singers, song creates a musical context for cooperative participation in order to reintegrate the spirit of the deceased within the family's lineage. As they sing "Baya Wabaya", with its prominent imagery of stabbing, spears, and war, participants in the procession to the grave call attention to this moment as one in which they collectively contend with the danger and pollution inherent in death.

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[19] For more on music and the role of the *vadzimu* in the liberation struggle, see for example Berliner (1971); Lan (1982); and (2000).

Consumption, Witchcraft, and Death

Upon the death of any one individual, family members may perceive dangers to the lineage as a whole. Zezuru diagnoses of illness focus on identifying the underlying origins of disease, emphasizing the role of spiritual forces outside of the world of visible phenomena, and death is frequently attributed to witchcraft, or to the actions of an aggrieved ancestor who has withdrawn protection from living descendants. Soon after a funeral, family members of the deceased seek to determine the cause of their relative's death, asking why a particular individual has died before reaching old age. To obtain a diagnosis, the family of the deceased schedules a consultation (*gata*) with a traditional healer (*n'anga*) before preparations for *kurova guva* begin. If the healer indicates that witchcraft or the discontent of lineage ancestors is responsible for the death of a kinsman, the matter is dealt with before *kurova guva* takes place, with compensation, commonly in the form of money or livestock, offered to expiate past wrongs on behalf of the lineage.

The family's failure or success in resolving the cause of death can become visible during *kurova guva* as the procession approaches the gravesite, where they confront possibly malevolent spiritual forces, including witchcraft. These forces may be manifest in signs visible to participants, preventing them from completing the necessary rites at the site of the grave. *Mbira* player Chartwell Dutiro, for example, relates how signs of witchcraft can complicate the ritual process:

> You can have guva that can take ten years.... *Kurova guva* can have such implications, you know? It can come from how that person died. You know, maybe this person was killed *nematsotsi* [literally "by thieves", also "by HIV/AIDS"] in Harare or something. That spirit is not going to be happy. Or maybe he was a nice person, but just some wicked people have done some things to the grave that you don't even walk near there. You know? I've seen graves which, the bees are coming out of the grave, which just basically means nobody can go there. I've seen graves....where there's always a snake. The moment you want to go there, the snake comes and chases you....So, here you're talking about the bridge between the living and the dead. And it's a sensitive area. (Interview, Dutiro 2001)

As they contend with these dangers, participants at *kurova guva* face great personal risk. Foremost among these is the danger posed by witchcraft to the family's *sahwira*, or ritual best friend, who is entrusted with performing rituals on top of the grave itself. As Tute Chigamba observes, in cases of witchcraft, "when we send the close friend, *sahwira*, to go and climb the grave, he may die" (Interview, Chigamba 2000a). In fact, Chigamba relates that his own grandfather died from this very cause (Interview, Chigamba 2000b).

These concerns can be especially serious in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Zimbabwe, as witchcraft is one among several dominant paradigms through which meaning is ascribed to the epidemic, producing what Paul Farmer has referred to in the Haitian context as a particular "structure of feeling about illness and death" (Farmer 1992:47). The perception that witchcraft is a cause of HIV/AIDS is deplored by many

working in the field of HIV prevention, who view such beliefs as a way in which individuals seek to absolve themselves of responsibility for their own action.[20] However, Alexander Rodlach's recent work in Zimbabwean Ndebele communities reminds us that the paradigm of witchcraft is one way in which individuals seek to identify the origins of illness in the hopes of finding a cure, thereby seeking to transform a terminal condition into one with a culturally coherent explanation (Rodlach 2006:54).

Through metaphors linking consumption and death, "Baya Wabaya" demonstrates a clear preoccupation with determining causes of mortality, whether or not HIV/AIDS is likely to have been a factor in an individual's death. This is illustrated in Juma's version in the line, "*Yowe*, the child has perished/*Ho yowe*, what was the child eaten by?" *Kushaura* singers may also introduce lines such as "It has become meat for roasting" and "It has become meat for vultures", comparing the deceased to a wild animal which is hunted and killed for consumption, whether roasted and eaten by humans, or consumed raw by wild animals in the forest. A wide range of individuals with whom I discussed "Baya Wabaya" emphasized a close relationship between metaphors of consumption and death. Thus, Beauler Dyoko, an *mbira* player living in Chitungwiza, Harare, stated, "...the song is specific to people who are coming from the graves, saying 'We have been eaten up. We have perished. We have become meat for roasting'" (Interview, Dyoko 2002). Musekiwa Chingodza, an *mbira* player from Murewa with whom I attended several ceremonies during my fieldwork, further elaborated upon this metaphor, observing,

> The body was buried, so they don't know what this person was consumed by. They can just say he was eaten by vultures. He was made meat for roasting. In terms of that person's death, when they don't know what he died from, it is really a war which killed him. It is war which has been invited by his death. (Interview, Chingodza 2002)

In relating this imagery back to themes of wilderness and war, Chingodza's comments point once again to the complexity of the dense network of symbolic associations invoked in the text of "Baya Wabaya", The imagery introduced by Chingodza, of vultures and roasted meat, point us toward a third important axis in this domain of related ideas; one which emphasizes a relationship between the ambiguity of death and the ambivalent nature of the wilderness or bush.

Dwelling in the Forest of Ambiguity: The Spirit as Wild Animal

Judith Juma's rendition of "Baya Wabaya" includes the *kushaura* lines, "*A ha* take up axes/*a ha* and wage war," supplementing the imagery of spears in the *mabvumira* part with reference to another weapon, in the form of an axe known as *gano* (pl. *makano*). Carried by possessed spirit mediums as they dance at *bira* ceremonies, *makano* are often described as ritual axes, distinguishing them from the more common household axe known as *demo*. Historically, however, *makano* have been employed for both practical activities, including hunting and warfare, and religious ritual. In an article on

[20] See for example Goercke (2004:15).

the changing social functions of Shona weaponry, William Dewey describes *makano* as "potent symbols of Shona beliefs and values", with "several functions, from utilitarian (war, hunting, and protection) to symbolic and religious" (1994:369). According to Dewey, "Ceremonial weapons in particular take on rich ambiguity that depends on the fact that they could be used to create or kill but in reality never are, and instead take on other subtly symbolic meanings" (371). By introducing the image of the *gano* axe, the lyrics to "Baya Wabaya" further reinforce symbolic associations between the violence of war and the dangers of hunting.

While "Baya Wabaya" belongs to the genre of *nziyo dzengondo*, or songs of war, its associations with hunting are another important aspect of the symbolic network it evokes. As E.M. Chiwome comments, "Hunting songs (*nziyo dzokuvhima/dzechidzimba*) have more or less the same function as war-songs. To hunters, the forest is an ambivalent symbol of providence and uncertainty: the same forest which provides them with meat also shelters man-eating beasts" (Chiwome 1992:15). Musekiwa Chingodza further confirms these linkages between hunting and war, observing that each activity involves violence, bloodshed, and death, and is related to questions of immediate survival for both individuals and communities (Interview, Chingodza 2002). Additionally, as in other areas of Africa, hunters were often the vanguards of the army, called upon to defend communities in times of war.[21] For Chingodza, the lyrics of "Baya Wabaya" suggest that just as a single individual cannot kill a large or dangerous animal, one person alone cannot bring back the spirit of the deceased. The imagery of "Baya Wabaya" thus emphasizes the need for collective ritual action in order to overcome the danger and ambiguity of death.

After her exhortation to take up the ritual *gano* axe to wage war against death, Juma proceeds to sing, "Hark, it has become an animal from the forest/Look, it has become an animal from a pool in the river". In equating the spirit with a wild animal, these lyrics point to the unregulated position it has occupied throughout the previous year, during which it has wandered without a fixed place of residence or regulated ties to kin. From the time of death until *kurova guva*, the spirit exists in a classic state of liminality, a condition "of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories" (Turner 1967:97). Given that the spirit is no longer a living person and not yet a *mudzimu* ancestor, it is now likened to an animal which dwells in the wilderness of the natural world, set ritually apart from the kinship structures that govern relationships between the *vadzimu* spirit elders and their living descendents.[22] As Judith Juma explains:

> This song means that when this child died, he was no longer among the living. He had become an animal of the forest. He had become an animal which dwells in the hills. He was no longer among his relatives…"Yave Nyama Yekugocha [Baya Wabaya]" means that when a person becomes an animal of the forest, that in itself is meat for roasting. Yes. Anyone who

[21] For a discussion of linkages between hunting and war in a Nigerian context, see for example Babalola (1997).

[22] I borrow the phrase "ritually apart" from Jantzen (1992).

> has dogs can send them into the forest to hunt, or can set a trap for this animal, for it is an animal of the forest, and anything that may wish to kill it can do so. (Interview, Juma 2000)

The imagery of "Baya Wabaya" thus calls attention to the spirit's ambiguous existence outside of conventional relationships between human and ancestral kin.

This position is a dangerous one, leaving the spirit vulnerable to pollution through witchcraft or contact with unclean spirits. As it is reincorporated within the family's lineage, the spirit must therefore be purified in order to ensure that it is not contaminated by forces which could directly harm living family members, or hinder the new *mudzimu* from acting on behalf of his or her descendants. As Juma explains,

> The one who died, that is to say that we are purifying him. When he died--some people die because of bad spirits, or because of serious diseases; anyone who has died in such a way will have this thing which has killed him, and it will take precedence [over his own spirit]. So we say to cleanse him; to bring him back into the home. (Interview, Juma 2000)

In order to avoid the possibility that other spirits will accompany the spirit of the deceased in its transformation into a *mudzimu* ancestor at *kurova guva*, participants refer obliquely to their departed kin as an "animal of the forest" or as "meat for roasting". By calling upon their relative in the figurative language of song, they discretely convey their intentions to perform *kurova guva* to the spirit of their kin, as he or she alone will immediately identify with this imagery of wilderness and war. Music therefore serves as a privileged means of indirect communication between the human and spirit worlds, able to summon the spirit of the deceased without arousing potentially malevolent forces which may accompany it back to the site of the grave. Song thus contributes to establishing a protected space for ritual activity at *kurova guva*, enabling participants to safely call upon their deceased relative and carry his or her spirit home.

Conclusion

At *kurova guva*, family members seek to wrest the spirit of their deceased kin away from death, transforming it into an ancestral *mudzimu* spirit. This ritual act constitutes a war against death, waged on many fronts as participants contend with concerns about witchcraft, violence, and the origins of illness. By singing "Baya Wabaya", they engage with a rich associative network of symbolic imagery which addresses many of these fundamental themes. In song, they reflect upon the danger and sorrow inherent in their task.

For participants at *kurova guva*, musical performance is one among many ritual acts which enable them to summon the spirit of the deceased and carry it home. In listening carefully to musical performance in this setting, we move closer to understanding how ritual action, as Jean and John Comaroff have suggested, "generates the very power it presupposes, how it actually conjures up the presence of absent potential" (Comaroff 1993). At *kurova guva*, song constitutes a distinctive form of ritual activity, and a

powerful means through which spiritual presence comes to be produced.[23] Performed during a moment of heightened ritual tension, "Baya Wabaya" mediates the spirit's final transition from the world of the living to the world of the ancestors. As well as evoking a complex network of symbolic associations, the song is itself an important instrument of ritual, used to invoke the spirit of the deceased and to carry it back to the lineage on its symbolical journey across the threshold of the home.

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[23] I am indebted to my graduate advisor Dr. Carol Muller for bringing to my attention the work of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht on the production of presence, as well as her own work on presence and diasporic musical listening. See Gumbrecht (2004); and Muller (forthcoming).

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